



## **Policy Regarding Mandatory Consultation Prior to Same-Gender Marriages**

*This process is to be completed once prior to any blessings of same-gender marriages being performed in a congregation. We expect that informal and prayerful conversations will continue after the formal consultation, but the consultation itself does not need to be repeated. While the Episcopal Church is using these rites on a trial basis, there will be an application for each marriage (see policies and procedures), but this is not the same as the initial consultation process. This one-time consultation is intended to give the Bishop adequate evidence of how these marriages are likely to be received by the lay leadership and the congregation as a whole prior to giving his permission to proceed, so that the shared ministry of the bishop and the local clergy may be responsive to all the people. It is the Bishop's intent to empower local clergy to exercise their ministry among the people entrusted to their care while exercising his own ministry of oversight and responsibility.*

Among congregations in the Diocese of Oklahoma, we anticipate a variety of responses to the General Convention resolutions authorizing for trial use the blessing of same-gender marriages. A crucial element of the policy regarding same-gender marriages is that no member of the clergy shall be compelled to officiate at such marriages in violation of his or her conscience. Furthermore, because the resolution in question places discretionary authority with the diocesan bishop, explicit written permission is required from the Bishop of Oklahoma before any congregation proceeds. Prior to any marriages taking place, clergy are expected to consult with the Vestry or Bishop's Committee and then, at a separate gathering(s) to consult with the congregation as a whole. Such gathering(s) shall be held with adequate advance notice and in a manner that invites participation from all members of the congregation.

The decision as to when or if a process of consultation is to be initiated shall be at the sole discretion of the rector, vicar, or priest-in-charge. The format for the gathering(s) is to be decided by the rector, vicar, or priest-in-charge and the senior warden, making sure that each person present at each gathering has the opportunity to speak and voice support or opposition. (Resources for study and reflection in preparation for congregational gatherings can be found on the diocesan website.) Once these gathering(s) have taken place, at a minimum, the rector, vicar, or priest-in-charge and senior warden must report their perceptions to the bishop in writing, noting any dissents from the majority opinion. These reports must be shared with all members of the Vestry or Bishop's Committee, who must be explicitly invited to add their own written comments. Once these documents have been assembled and sent to the bishop, the bishop will grant or deny permission to proceed on a congregation by congregation basis. In no case, should a congregation proceed until this permission has been received in writing. In some cases, clarification or additional information may be required by the bishop. It shall be the joint responsibility of the rector, vicar, or priest-in-charge and of the senior warden to ensure a full and adequate consultation, and to report the results faithfully to the bishop. Once permission has been received, marriages may proceed following the Diocesan Policies and Procedures for the Blessing of Same-Gender Marriages.

The purpose of this consultation is not to give lay leadership veto power over whether to proceed with same-gender marriages or over any particular marriage. Indeed, it is expected that congregations that anticipate blessing same-gender marriages will ordinarily have this conversation well in advance of any

particular request. The purpose, rather, is to ensure an informed response on the part of the local clergy, under the direction of the bishop, that promotes our unity in Christ, the integrity of our witness to the Gospel, and a principled, pastoral response for all people in the Diocese of Oklahoma.